Santa Clara County Flora and Fauna

Insects

By Albert E. Johansson

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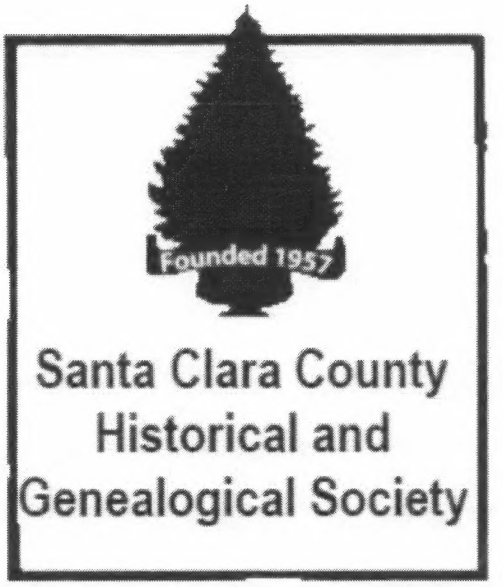
Circa 1936

Notes:

- Original in possession of the Santa Clara County Archives, San Jose, California
- Scanned by the Santa Clara County Historical and Genealogical Society



March 24, 1936

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS

The Honey Bee is a real profit maker, and many apiaries have been founded. The common varieties are the German, Italian, and Carniolan. During the summer months ants constitute a real nuisance in many homes, invading food supplies. They often are a pest in poultry yards, infesting very young chicks. The same holds true for pigeon lofts. All members of this order undergo a complete metamorphosis, and at some stage or other in their career are possessed of four membranous wings. The Mud-dauber Wasp captures spiders, paralyzes them, and seals them in mudcells as food for its pupae.

In California the flea is a serious pest, because the warm winters allow these creatures to extend their life span throughout the year, whereas in the north and east the cold reduces the tribe to a considerable extent annually. When they infest the Rat or the Ground Squirrel, they have in past times constituted an actual danger by carrying bubonic plague from inbound oriental ships and disseminating it over the country around the bay. The larvae undergo their development in the dust of dog, mouse, rat, gopher, or squirrel habitations.

The Diptera are the true flies. To this order belongs the Common House Fly, carrier of disease, and scavenger de-luxe. The larvae of the order usually live in some kind of filth, although some are parasitic upon other animals. Crane Flies, Gnats, Mosquitoes, Gall Glies, Midges, Snipe

March 24, 1936

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS
(continued)

Flies, Horse Flies, and Syrphid Flies, all have a local habitat. It is said that the race of flies has more of those characteristics which make insects more fit to dominate the earth than the nearest competitors in their phylum, or group. An interesting measure that can be taken against that annoying disease bearer, the Mosquito, is the introduction of Mosquito Fish into whatever body of water they breed in. These small green swimmers have a voracious appetite for wrigglers, the larvae of Mosquitoes.

Beetles are plentiful, as they are everywhere. Ground Beetles, Diving Beetles, Carrion Beetles, Ladybird Beetles, Weevils, and others, are found in the district. The Ladybird (known also as the Ladybug) is a very great aid to farmers, especially those who raise prunes, for it is a deadly enemy of San Jose Scale, which is parasitic on these trees as well as others. Both it and its aligator-shaped larvae can be seen browsing about on tree twigs in search of their favorite food, which looks like nothing so much as a little mound-shaped lump of brown on the bark. Ladybugs have been gathered in great sacks in the higher altitudes where they hibernate, and brought into the valleys for the express purpose of destroying the enemies of the orchadist.

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS
(continued)

An interesting inhabitant of mountain streams is the Giant Water Bug, which is so large that it captures beings like tadpoles and minnows. The female sees to it that the maternal duties are carried out by the male. She does this through the simple method of gluing the eggs to his back as they are laid. This forces him to remain in water, for he cannot fly with his wing sheathes firmly glued down.

There are a few Earwigs. These insects usually hide in the low grass by day but become active at night. They take their name from a European superstition which credits them with maliciously crawling into the ears of human beings.

Aphids are a constant pest, as every rose gardener knows, or as anyone who has had much experience cleaning lettuce knows. Fortunately, the Ladybug has as great a taste for them as it has for the San Jose Scale. Their numbers may be kept in check, too, by both dust and liquid poisons. They belong to the order of Homoptera, which also includes Spittlebugs, Treehoppers, Leafhoppers, and the dreaded Scalebugs. Spittlebugs look exactly as their name suggests they do. Aphids, or Plant Lice, are often kept by the ants as "cows". The ants obtain a juice called honeydew from them. This juice is secreted when the Aphid is

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS
(continued)

stroked by an ant's feelers. Scalebugs were once a dreaded scourge in this locality but now they have been brought under some control, although the menace is not past. Carnivorous insects, and the extensive use of spraying, have been responsible for a check upon this parasite.

The order of Hemiptera are the true bugs. It includes the Bedbugs, and other pests, such as the Harlequin Cabbage Bug, Squash Bug, and the Box Elder Bug. Water-striders, Waterbugs, and Back-swimmers are also members of this order. The first and second named can give unpleasant stings. They usually live upon plant or animal juices.

The Anoplura are not a pleasant race. Their mouths are formed for sucking, and they live upon blood. They a re the true lice.

Few cherry farmers can be found who have not had occasion to curse the Thrips. These insects are very small, but they damage crops out of all proportion to their size. In the adult stage they have four long, narrow wings, but the young are devoid of these appendages. There are Cotton, Sunflower, Pear, Citrus, Bean, Onion Thrips, and other species. The remedy used against them is usually a spray with a nicotine base.

Almost every specie of bird has its own variety of louse, and that is the reason that they take dust baths.

March 24, 1936

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS
(continued)

Their scientific name means Wool-eaters, and they live upon feathers. The Common Hen Louse is a well-known source of worry to poultry raisers. It strips the heads of some fowls bare of feathers.

Libraries are inhabited by little gnawers called Psocidae or Book-lice, who live upon paste and bookbindings. Out-of-doors they are found in fungi, lichens, and under the barks of trees.

Dragonflies of all descriptions can be seen darting over their native waters, the sun glistening in their metallic bodies. They are carnivorous and catch their prey while in flight. The young are born in the water. This order of insects has been of aid to man in his fight against the Mosquitoes and other small pests. Damselflies belong to the same order. The Darner, a dragonfly, has been granted the power by credulous people of being capable of sewing up ears of humans who have approached too closely, or meddled too much.

None of the Mayflies has a common name. Their scientific name (Ephemerida) means "those that last but a day". This is given them because they live but an hour or two after emerging from the water in which they were born. They are given wings only to mate and lay eggs; then go back to oblivion.

March 24, 1936

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS
(continued)

Lacewing Flies are found. They have an interesting relative in the Ant Lion or Doodle Bug, which digs a small conical trap in the ground for unwary insects to fall into. It lies at the bottom of the hole it has dug with two long jaws projecting through the narrow dusty walls of its home to seize upon anything that might fall into them.

Termites, or White Ants, eat wood, and because of that they are destructive to man's dwelling places and other buildings. The Large Termite is found in rotten logs and stumps. The Western Termite is more common and also more destructive. These white ants, like the true ants, are divided into classes, having queens, workers, drones, and soldiers.

The Jerusalem Cricket, the California Camel Cricket, the Field Cricket, and many other Katydids and Grasshoppers, are present. Most eat plants and are destructive to man. Some eat animal food. Cockroaches are common here, and these certainly are irritating, dirty, and destructive. Some of the Katydids, and some of the others, compensate somewhat for taking their meals in our fields by singing a pleasing song that is well worth hearing on a warm evening.

The Thysanura are the well-known Silver Fishes.

Federal Writers' Projects
District 9
Albert E. Johansson

March 24, 1936

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS

Numerous species of butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera) are common to this district, many of which are destructive to the profits of the commercial farmer and take a toll of the beauty of residential gardens. The Morning Cloak, whose larvae can denude a beautiful willow tree in a surprisingly short time, can be seen any warm spring day spreading its velvety black and gold wings in the sun. The Western Swallowtail performs a gyrating mating dance over the fields. The little white Cabbage Butterfly, which, as its name indicates, haunts truck gardens, is common. The Polyphemus Moth buzzes with its extended egg-swollen body about tomato vines at night.

The larvae of almost all butterflies and moths develop to the pupal stage upon vegetable food, and it is this that makes them so harmful. However much we may admire the perfect winged creature that is the final goal of a caterpillar, we must take into account the economic cost of that goal. For this reason farmers are always engaged in the destruction of such injurious creatures as the Tomato Cutworm.

Bees, wasps, and ants abound. Bumblebees, black and barred in black and yellow, rush through the flowers. Sawflies, Horntails, Ichneumon Wasps, and many gall-making species, are everywhere. Some of these creatures are parasitic upon caterpillars and borers, so they assist man.

March 24, 1936

S-190

CLASS I - FLORA AND FAUNA

INSECTS
(continued)

They inhabit our homes, and one can often see them scoot across the walls to some dark hiding place. They live under wall paper, stones, or in pantries and closets. They are variously called Bristle Tails, Silver Fish, or Fish Moths.

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CONSULTANT: C. Pickwell